

It is the stuff of good history, this—a leadership that was buoyant and dynamic; a large program designed to enable the government to catch up with a generation of lag and solve the problems that crowded upon it; a people quickened into resolution and self-confidence; a nation brought to realize its responsibilities and its potentialities. How it lends itself to drama! The sun rises on a stricken field; the new leader raises the banner and waves it defiantly at the foe; his followers crowd about him, armies of recruits emerge from the shadows and throng into the ranks; the bands play, the flags wave, the army moves forward, and soon the sound of battle and the shouts of victory are heard in the distance. In perspective we can see that it was not quite like that, but that was the way it seemed at the time.

Not to all Americans, to be sure. Many of Roosevelt's contemporaries reacted to "That Man"—and to the New Deal—the way the Federalists had reacted to Jefferson and the Whigs to Jackson. They saw dictatorship and revolution where the majority of Americans saw leadership and a democratic resurgence. They were, of course, mistaken. The New Deal was in fact pretty much what the phrase implied: not a new game with new rules, but a reshuffle of cards that had too long been stacked against the workingman and the farmer and the small shopkeeper. To be sure, there was no guarantee that these players would now hold the winning cards, but at least they had as good a chance as any of the others. In the perspective of almost a generation it is the conservative character of the New Deal and of its leader that is most impressive. The "Roosevelt Revolution" was in fact the culmination of half a century of historical development. It was deeply rooted in American experience; it relied on familiar instruments of politics and law; even its style was characteristically American.

Even before recovery had been achieved (and some indeed would question whether it would not have been achieved in any event; others, whether it could have been achieved short of war), and while the reform program was still incomplete, the shadow of totalitarianism fell across the land and lengthened with every passing day. Roosevelt, like Wilson, was almost instinctively isolationist; like Wilson he came to understand that isolation was no longer a meaningful concept and that what happened in Italy, Germany, and Japan powerfully affected not only American security but American freedom and de-

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT
AND THE NEW DEAL

THE NEW AMERICAN NATION SERIES

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By **WILLIAM E. LEUCHTENBURG**



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For Jean

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Editors' Introduction

THE crisis and the failure of the twenties set the stage in America for the thirties, set the stage and almost wrote the plot. And once the inherited crisis had been set on the road to solution, another, and even more extraneous, crisis emerged to stamp its character on the latter part of the decade: the crisis of totalitarianism and war abroad. How could the New Deal develop a character of its own, one independent of past and future?

Who can doubt that it did, and who can doubt that the explanation is to be found very largely in the character and personality of Franklin D. Roosevelt? Not since Washington had any President dominated his administration, and his time, as did F.D.R. If it is true that much of his progress, domestic and foreign, was imposed on him by circumstances beyond his control, it is no less true that to an extraordinary degree he imposed his own will and purpose upon that program.

The character of the Republican ascendancy of the twenties had been pervasively negative; the character of the New Deal was overwhelmingly positive. "This nation asks for action, and action now," Roosevelt said in his first inaugural address, and asked for "power to wage war against the emergency." "Let us move forward in strong and active faith" were the last words that he wrote. Apathy, resignation, defeat, despair—these were the foes that Roosevelt routed from the scene; action, advance, confidence, hope—these were the sentiments that he inspired in his followers, the vast majority of the American people.